



May 18, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-2803

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-1702

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell,

As representatives of U.S. science, engineering, and higher education organizations, we write to you to express our deep concern regarding amendments that were passed in the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act, H.R. 2146) in the House and the 21st Century Postal Service Act (S. 1789) in the Senate, which would place severe restrictions on government employees' abilities to attend meetings and conferences. We represent hundreds of thousands of scientists, engineers, and mathematicians—many of whom work for the federal government—across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Our organizations are predominantly non-profit, 501(c)(3) professional societies with a mandate to advance the progress of scientific and technological research and education. Our organizations realize that goal through the publication of peer-review journals, and by convening large scientific conferences, workshops, lectures, and seminars. The free exchange of scientific ideas and information is crucial to advancing science and innovation, and conferences are a standard mechanism for the transfer of information among scientists and engineers.

We recognize that Congress has a responsibility to prevent wasteful government spending. We are concerned, however, that the language in the amendments would inadvertently impede the free flow of scientific information and the professional development of scientists and engineers. This would potentially work against critical national goals related to national security, public health, science education, innovation, and competitiveness.

Recently, Washington D.C. hosted the 2012 USA Science and Engineering Festival, which engaged 150,000 attendees. Many non-profit scientific and engineering societies participated in the Festival, and almost 40 federal government agencies and offices provided hands-on science exhibits and/or public access to government scientists. It is unclear whether government scientists' participation in this education-oriented activity would then preclude their engagement in any other scientific conference in the same year, under the current amendment language.

The undersigned organizations urge you to protect the integrity of the scientific enterprise and encourage you to allow greater flexibility for government employees to attend scientific and technical conferences organized or supported by professional societies and non-governmental organizations.

American Association for the Advancement of Science  
 American Association of Anatomists  
 American Association for Dental Research  
 American Association of Immunologists  
 American Astronomical Society  
 American Economic Association  
 American Educational Research Association  
 American Geophysical Union  
 American Institute of Biological Sciences  
 American Mathematical Society  
 American Physiological Society  
 American Society of Agronomy  
 American Society for Engineering Education  
 American Society for Investigative Pathology  
 American Society of Mammalogists  
 American Society of Mechanical Engineers  
 American Society for Microbiology  
 American Society of Plant Biologists  
 American Sociological Association  
 American Statistical Association  
 Association of American Geographers  
 Association of American Medical Colleges  
 Association of Biomolecular Resource Facilities  
 Association for Molecular Pathology  
 Association of Population Centers  
 Association for Women in Mathematics  
 Association for Women in Science  
 Biophysical Society  
 Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation  
 Consortium of Social Science Associations  
 Council of Energy Research and Education Leaders  
 Council of Environmental Deans and Directors  
 Crop Science Society of America  
 Ecological Society of America  
 Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology  
 Genetics Society of America  
 Geological Society of America  
 Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers- USA  
 Mathematical Association of America  
 National Council for Science and the Environment  
 National Postdoctoral Association  
 Population Association of America  
 Research!America  
 The American Federation for Medical Research  
 The Biomedical Engineering Society  
 The Optical Society  
 The Ornithological Council  
 Society for Neuroscience  
 Society for the Study of Reproduction  
 Soil Science Society of America  
 SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics